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The Peace Corps Wants YOU

By Shelby Coffey III

Peace Corps Director Joe Blatchford is a true believer who sneers at True Believers

Yes, it was one of those Epic moments-of-a-fine-lifetime for Joe Blatchford: the President arose and smiled at him across the magnificent, blue and gold carpeted office. The President was in a congratulatory mood. Joe Blatchford had trudged past the inquisition of Henry Kissinger, past the patient questioning of Secretary of State William Rogers, past the quiet checks of J. Edgar Hoover's agents. He had trudged up from the false glamour of life as a tennis bum, up from the shoe-string economies of running a private miniature Peace Corps (named ACCION) in Latin America, up from defeat as a 1968 congressional candidate in Los Angeles. He had for years impressed the President's good friend, Don Kendall, head of Pepsi Cola. And now the President was telling Joe Blatchford that the mantle of leadership of the real Peace Corps was to be conferred on him.

Joe Blatchford stood agog in the Executive office: "It's really awesome," he says. . . "when you walk into the room you expect organs; you can't think." Later, he was more at ease when the President announced his appointment in an outdoor ceremony. A photographer caught the scene: a bright May day in 1969, the President, looking exceptionally fit, is grinning paternally at Joe's gorgeous wife, is smooching Joe and Joe is accepting the kiss

with a mild smile, quick-frozen on his ruddy profile. A grand day in the Rose Garden then, but grand days in political Washington have a way of being followed by monsoons, and quickly.

Joe Blatchford still has that smile, but it comes a little less often now, according to friends. The near year and a half that he has spent administrating down at Connecticut Avenue has roller-coastered into a confusing, demanding period.

Some of the resident Washington staff, heavily Democratic, have bellowed quite publicly about the agency's "New Directions." Congress barely refrained from gutting the \$98 million appropriation. Volunteers have embarrassed the administration with anti-war protests. The unfortunate Famous Memo, promising Congress less politicized Volunteers in the future, hit the press. Lots of people have started talking of Peace Corps as hopelessly outdated. And even the Director's office has been occupied by returned Volunteers who flew the Viet Cong flag out the window.

These and other tribulations have left Joe Blatchford with a heightened sense of transience. Recently he told a Peace Corps magazine interviewer: "I serve at the pleasure of the President. . . never know how long you're going to be here." Little chips of sadness

mark. (During another talk at his Georgetown home, his large gesturing hands momentarily still, he turned to his wife, and said "I may be talking myself out of a job.")

Still, a near-feverish optimism generally continues to course through Joe Blatchford's talk. And well it might: his whole life, his whole philosophy has been built on hopes for the future, for achievement; and those hopes have brought him a long way from the boring life of a disgruntled Berkeley law student. Not for nothing was Joe Blatchford raised as a Christian Scientist. Not for nothing does he still believe "in the perfectability of man." That may sound suspiciously like the "raised on Wheaties" shallowness some liberal columnists have been trying to pin on square-jawed, inch-under-6-foot, blue-eyed Joe Blatchford. But Joe Blatchford is, if anything, a mixed man. Even long-time friends still seem a little mystified by the various facets of his character. He is endowed with all the attributes that a certain type of Republican legislator brings to Washington: the whiff of the jock (schoolboy tennis champ) and of Big Business (backed by mogul Kendall); the trace of the idealist (big on William James) and of the frat man (even a bit of the Quiet American thrown in. (Right